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The author lists steps for constructing a research study guaranteeing "statistically significant results when comparing two populations which differ linguistically." Many of these steps are direct quotations from typical research reports--choose a control group as much like yourself as possible: assume your own dialect is standard: encode all directions, questions, and answers in your own dialect: judge responses as correct only if they are properly stated in your dialect: use experiences drawn from the control (your own) group: follow a rule of thumb: if something is important to you, it is important: judge all data as deviation from the control group. you are the norm, all else is deficiency. This facetious model for research is based on a "total fiction: that language can be judged on a single norm and that language difference and language deficiency are synonymous." Every child achieves a basic mastery of his dialect well before beginning school and can express anything important to him to the people in his speech community. He speaks his dialect grammatically: if he didn't, he couldn't be understood since grammar is the system of language and all language is systematic. Because "all people are ethno-centric," we build our stereotypes out of differences between ourselves and others. We need objective humility for effective research, not "elitist" views. (MM)

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LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE AND THE ETHNO-CENTRIC RESEARCHER*

I'd like to begin with a simple list of steps for constructing a research study that will guarantee statistically significant results when comparing two populations which differ linguistically. The procedures will produce results regardless of the subject of the research as long as language is in some way involved. But don't worry about that. It always is involved.

Step 1. Choose a control group as much like yourself as possible. If studying children, your own or those of your neighbors and relatives will do best. The experimental group may be any other. Labels are unneeded but a wide range are available.

Step 2. Assume that your own dialect is standard and correct and all others are corruptions of your own!

Step 3. Encode all directions, questions, conversations with subjects, and statements in your own dialect. Again an easy task since you know it so well.

Step 4. Judge responses as correct only if they are properly stated in your dialect.

Step 5. Use experiences, referents, concepts which are drawn from the control group, that is your own circle. A simple rule of thumb: If something is important

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to you, it is important.

Step 6. Create a pleasant experimental setting in which you feel comfortable, surround yourself and the subjects with the tools of your trade, books, electronic equipment, etc.

Step 7. Provide a warm, friendly tester who speaks your dialect well and who can tolerate the odd characteristics of your subjects without reacting too extremely.

Step 8. Be sure to judge all data as deviation from the control group. A single hierarchical scale must be adhered to at all times. Remember you are the norm. All else is deficiency.

When you have demonstrated the deficiency, you will then be entitled to speculate as to its cause. Here there are few restrictions. But be sure to begin your speculations with a statement of sympathy for the deficient population and a vow that you will bring all your resources to bear on the problem of helping them to overcome the deficiencies, that is become more like you.*

If you do not choose to speculate, which is a pity because your speculations are much more likely to be quoted than your research findings, you may simply state that the causes of

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*This article contains a number of quotations which are not identified as to source. The intent is not to focus criticism on any one study but to represent the type of ideology present in much of educational research.

cumulative deficit and restricted language of disadvantaged children have been amply documented in the language. Footnote that statement with references to the speculation of other researchers. It will be to your advantage to quote researchers who have themselves cited your speculation in prior reports. This will serve to emphasize the consistency of the results of your study with other research.

If you choose to speculate several general categories are available.

1. Cultural Deprivation. Refer to the breakdown of family structure, lack of nursery rhymes and books, etc..

2. Experiential Deprivation. Cite the well known lack of experience of deprived groups. Use such phrases as "They've only seen the world from the back of a migratory truck" or "Many black children have never been more than a few blocks away from their ghetto homes."

3. Lack of verbal inter-action. Remind your reader that no one talks to disadvantaged children. Their mothers are busy, preoccupied and poor language models. An alternate tack is to suggest that their environment is so noisy they can't find the language in it. Suggest that their many siblings yell at them all the time. Or suggest that "conversation is almost entirely functional in the homes of the economically deprived."

4. Nutritional deprivation. Try something like, Negro children are most often the victims of prenatal complications, premature birth and perinatal damage... The greater incidence of these complications has been found to account almost entirely for

the usually lower IQ's among Negro children.

5. The poverty-culture bit. Should you be concerned about the charge that your study is culturally biased suggest that members of the culture of poverty, have intellectual, emotional, social and familial attitudes and responses which are strikingly similar, regardless of who they are or where they may be.

6. Note well: Do not cite genetic inferiority except as a minor cause of difference.

You can take two positions regarding what your study shows about the language of the group you studied.

1. They are verbally destitute. Try something like it is abundantly clear that ghetto children lack facility in the use of certain basic language structures.

To support such a statement you will need to interpret your data as showing that the disadvantaged group uses language which is meager, restricted in variety of vocabulary, repetitive and routinized, incorrect gramatically, in accurate in pronunciation and articulation, with poor syntactic form.

2. They are linguistically underdeveloped. This is really a preferred choice because it emphasizes the childlike characteristics of the disadvantaged group even as adults. It also leaves the way open for you to suggest compensatory programs, experiments designed to raise the level of syntax of the disadvantaged; overcome phonological deficiencies, etc.. Such a view also fits nicely with the cognitive underdevelopment theories since one can point out that children with underdeveloped language cannot be expected to acquire concepts. This will then justify advocacy

of intervention to change their linguistic behavior before it is too late.

There's only one small problem with this otherwise foolproof model for research. It's based on a total fiction: that language can be judged on a single norm and that language difference and language deficiency are synonymous.

Difference in language certainly exists. Groups of speakers of a language separated in time or space or by age, economic or social circumstance, or even values and interest will speak different dialects. But the differences are systematic ones. Each dialect is a fully functioning language variant and in fact a language may be defined as a family of dialects. Each speaker has a native dialect and eventually understands and may even speak a variety of other dialects with which he comes in contact.

The truth about language difference is not complicated and well documented by socio-linguists. Every child achieves a basic mastery of his dialect well before he comes to school. He is capable of expressing anything that is important to him to the people in his speech community. He speaks his dialect grammatically. If he didn't he couldn't be understood since grammar is the system of language and all language is systematic. Speakers of different dialects encounter some problems in communicating with each other but this is a two way street. If children can't understand a teacher too well neither can the teacher understand the children too well.

Many people have latched onto Bernstein's description of lower-class Britisher's using a restricted code as compared to the expanded code of upper-class Britishers. Bernstein himself

has gone to great pains to indicate that he does not believe that that makes the language of the upper-class better in any linguistic sense.

But the contrast is not useful at all unless one is willing to grant that all speakers of any language have both restricted and expanded codes depending on their interests and experiences. Here I use my expanded code but I am constrained to a restricted code when I try to explain to a mechanic what's wrong with my car.

In fact one may always resort to metaphoric language to say just about anything. So an automobile was a horseless carriage till the new term became generally known.

All dialects differ from each other in all respects to some degree.

In phonology, the child learns early to produce and perceive the significant sounds of his language. This requires that he learn not to hear the insignificant sounds that surround those that are significant. Learning what not to pay attention to is at least as important as learning what to pay attention to. So when he comes from Maine and he hears someone say meteor (Miydya) he knows it's a shooting star and to him Marshall McLuhan is concerned with media (miytiar).

There are grammar differences too. In one dialect a conditional statement: "I asked him if he wanted to go." in another dialect would be "I ask him did he want to go." Both are grammatical and generated by the rules of the respective grammars.

Vocabulary varies of course too, as this example may illustrate:

A teacher tells her kindergarten class as she passes out milk. "Boys and girls, be sure you don't waste any milk. Milk is good for you." A few minutes later, she sees a child carefully throw a half filled carton in the waste basket. "I thought I told you not to waste your milk," says she. "I ain't waste that milk," responds the distressed child. What's the problem? In his dialect when you waste milk, it lands on the floor or table, that is the translation of what he understood was "don't spill" which he was careful not to do as he threw the milk away.

Idioms also vary from dialect to dialect. Idioms are frequently not recognized as idioms by those who use them. "Turn off the light" is not considered an idiom by someone who thinks "cut the light" sounds odd or quaint.

Idioms don't translate well either. "Fixin' to" has no real counterpart in other English dialects.

It should be obvious that one must deal with linguistic reality in interpreting performance on language tasks. It should be obvious that one must judge each speech form by its own norms. It should be obvious that one can only answer questions in one's own language.

But these obvious truths are almost universally ignored in educational research. Many of my facetious suggestions earlier were direct quotations from research reports.

The truth is that we <u>want</u> to treat language difference as deficiency. We researchers are intellectual snobs who have conjured up a cultural-linguistic hierarchy at the pinnacle of which we've placed ourselves -- rightfully entitled to the highest status in all respects.

We believe that we made it through the educational maze to higher degrees because we are really superior. We believe that superiority is manifested in our taste in music, art and literature, in how we dress and eat, in how we walk and talk. Our thoughts are the only thoughts worth thinking, ours the only lives worth living.

Most people believe themselves to be superior. We know we are. For others good old fashioned common sense stereotypes will do to support their beliefs. We build our stereotypes out of differences between ourselves and others that are significant at the .01 level.

All people are ethno-centric, but we transform our love of self into a yardstick of perfection. All are judged by the extent to which they fall short of us.

We wrap ourselves in an impervious shield of statistics and feel no guilt about prejudice and rationalize our rejection of those unlike us since (a) we really are better (as measured by tests we construct) and (b) we're quite willing to help others become more like us - in fact we feel quite justified in forcing them to do so even if they don't currently see the advantage of change.

We further console ourselves that semi-enlightened members of the inferior groups are eagerly striving to be more like us.

This elitist and at times racist view permeates our research. We seek to explain the non-existent deficiencies that are produced by the elitist framework that spawned the original research by applying our own elitist values to the explanations. Blacks are treated as sick whites and all are seen as imperfect versions of

ourselves. How else can one explain the continuous use of white middle-class control groups in studies of other populations?

So predominant in our research is our snobbery that large bodies of research are virtually worthless. Most studies of child language development lumped immaturity and dialect difference together, compounding an already faulty language model. In fact, studies have been presented by researchers who apparently think one can study language, language acquisition and language performance without knowing anything about language.

Studies relating to literacy and language programs in school are hopelessly confounded by elitist views that make one sound system, one syntax, one vocabulary right and all others wrong. The whole language curriculum is built on a base of linguistic misconceptions.

We have virtually no reliable data on IQ, achievement, or learning ability, because of the elitist yardstick for language built into the research designs and into the most revered and time-honored tests.

We think when we show that a test correlates with later success in school we have demonstrated the validity of the test when in fact all we have demonstrated is the irrelevance of both test and curriculum.

Fortunately, the populations we are studying are beginning to publicly reject our descriptions of them and to expose us for what we are.

Before we can learn about others, we will need to study ourselves carefully. The result may be painful, but perhaps we can then approach our task with the objective humility that any effective researcher must possess.

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